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ABSTRACT

Early intervention programs have been designed to improve the educational chances for at-risk or poor children who are more likely than middle class children to come from families lacking characteristics that contribute to children's educational success. This study used an ethnographic orientation to evaluate the impact of the South Dakota Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project on poor children and their families. The demonstration group was composed of children and families who received comprehensive Head Start-like services in addition to educational services, and the comparison group consisted of children and families who received only educational services. Eight family service coordinators maintained routine contacts with families and schools and provided services directly to families or through referral to other agencies. Comprehensive services included health, parent involvement, social, and educational services related to transition from preschool to the public elementary school. Data were collected in the spring of each year since 1993 from 200 of the 425 children in 2 cohorts who have received services. Data were also collected through structured interviews and participant observation. Results indicated that children's health, school attendance, and home situations have improved. Parents and caregivers have been empowered, have become more involved in their children's education, have improved interactions with school personnel, and have become more comfortable in the schools. (Contains about 67 references.) (KB)

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Comprehensive School-based Services: Making A Difference for Children and Families

Paper Presented at the 1997 Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, April 3-6, 1997

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Abstract

Comprehensive Head Start-like services have been provided in six different South Dakota schools through implementation of the South Dakota Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project. In 1993 an ethnographic evaluation began generating data on the effects of the services on children and families. Results indicate that children's health, school attendance, and home situations have improved. Parents/caregivers have been empowered, have become more involved in their children's educational experiences, have improved interactions with school personnel, and have become more comfortable in the schools.

Comprehensive School-based Services: Making a Difference for Children and Families

According to 1991 national statistics, 21.5% of American children younger than eighteen live in families below the poverty level. In international comparisons, American children are ranked "dead last" among eighteen industrialized nations (Children's Defense Fund, 1996). Taylor reported the picture of American children more bleakly and estimated that, "close to one third of American children fall into poverty by the time they reach age fifteen and that 50% of the children are likely to live in near-poverty at some time during their childhood" (1996). What are the implications for the educational success of these children, and what is being done to assist children and families? These are the questions address in this paper.

Cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) or social capital (Coleman, 1989) are defined in the research as a group of family characteristics most commonly encountered in middle-class and upper-class families which influence their children's educational success. The characteristics include, "parents' familiarity with the school system; parents' access to informal sources of information about the schools, teachers, and programs available; students' familiarity with 'high culture'; parents' involvement in the schools; and the degree to which parents are comfortable interacting with teachers and other personnel" (Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992, p. 12). Vacha and McLaughlin added that at-risk children are more likely to come from families which do not exhibit these characteristics (1992).

At-risk learners have been defined as having a high probability of academic failure and eventually dropping out of school (Ross, Smith, Casey, & Slavin, 1995). The literature identified poverty as the most prominent characteristic of at-risk students (Bianchi, 1984; Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Chafel, 1990: Gleason, 1993; Horacek, Ramey, Campbell, Hoffmann, & Fletcher, 1987; Ross et al., 1995; Rush, 1992; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). The numbers of at-risk students seem to be increasing and have been the focus of considerable national debate. As global competition increases, the nation's worries increase. Fears are that the nation will not have a competent work force in the future.

Early intervention is suggested by the research as the most effective approach for helping at-risk learners (Chafel, 1990; Gleason, 1993; Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). Gleason (1993) and Zigler and Muenchow (1992) believe that the comprehensive program of the National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (NTP) may be an efficient use of government funding for improving the life-chances for at-risk students. Gleason said, "The concepts are simple. Children can't learn if they're hungry or sick" (Gleason, 1993).

NTP as Context

Head Start, a preschool program that has provided comprehensive services to children and families for over thirty years, has recently been expanded into selected elementary schools through implementation of the NTP. In September of 1991, the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families awarded thirty-one

grants to community based consortiums. The consortiums were responsible for designing and implementing approaches that would successfully support children and families as they left Head Start and began their early elementary (kindergarten to third grade) experience. The consortium partners are a local Head Start agency, local education agencies, and a local higher education institution.

In accordance with the Federal Register, each NTP site selected two groups of participants: (a) a demonstration group composed of children and families who receive comprehensive Head Start-like services in addition to the educational services provided by their local education agency, and (b) a comparison group composed of children and families who receive only the educational services provided by their local education agency (ACYF, 1991). The NTP is testing the hypothesis that providing continuous comprehensive services to former Head Start children as they move from kindergarten through third grade will maintain and enhance the early benefits attained by the Head Start children and their families (Kennedy, 1993). A second cohort of kindergarten children was added in the fall of 1993, and at the present, Cohort II children are in the third grade.

SDTP as Context

South Central Child Development, Inc. (SCCD), which provides Head Start services to children and families in a sixteen county area in south central South Dakota, is the grantee for the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (SDTP) within the state. Consortium partners are nine local education agencies located throughout the South Central Child Development, Inc.

(SCCD) service area and the University of South Dakota's Center for Interactive Technologies in Education and Corporations. The Educational Research and Service Center (ERSC) conducts independent evaluation of the SDTP through a contractual agreement with SCCD. Of the nine local education partners, four school districts are SDTP demonstration sites only, three districts are comparison sites only, and two districts serve as both demonstration and comparison sites.

The SDTP sites are located primarily in rural nonadjacent counties. Butler Flora et al. (1992) defined rural and nonadjacent counties as counties that do not have places of 2,500 or more population and are not adjacent to a metropolitan county. Two South Dakota sites are located in less urbanized nonadjacent counties. Less urbanized nonadjacent counties are counties with an urban population of 2,555 to 19,999 and not adjacent to a metropolitan county (Butler Flora et al., 1992). The majority of the population are Caucasian Americans (60%-75%) with Native American children and families the majority of the remainder (20%-35%). About one-fourth of the families in the area could be identified as low-income recipients, and single parents head about one-third of the households.

The elementary schools vary in size and composition of students. Some schools include pre-school through high school, some are only kindergarten through fifth grade, and some have primarily Native American students. School sizes range from about 100 students to about 600. On the average, about 225 Cohort I students have received services and about 200 Cohort II students continue to receive SDTP comprehensive services. Of the children enrolled in the SDTP, 110

Cohort I and 90 Cohort II students are part of the NTP Core Data Set. The NTP Core Data Set was collected in the fall and the spring of the kindergarten year and has been collected in the spring of the first, second, and third grade years.

Comprehensive Services as Context

Comprehensive Head Start-like services are provided to SDTP demonstration participants by eight family service coordinators (FSCs). The FSCs provide the services either through referrals to local and regional agencies or through direct service. The FCSs maintain routine contacts with families and schools in an effort to improve communication between homes and schools, help families gain access to needed resource/service agencies, assist teachers/administrators to develop relationships with service providers, and provide other support as needed and/or possible that will allow parents/caregiver to enhance their role in their children's school experience. All the comprehensive services are provided at no cost to the demonstration families participating in the SDTP. During the 1996-1997 school year, limited social services have been extended to include at-risk students outside of Cohort II. The at-risk students are usually referred to the FSCs by principals, teachers, or counselors.

Delineation and descriptions of the comprehensive services are taken from the Head Start Transition Project Parent Handbook (South Central Child Development, Inc. 1996). The comprehensive services can be broken down into the following four components:

1. The health component consists of vision, hearing, and growth assessment screenings, biennial physical exams, assessments of children's immunization status, support for bringing immunizations up-to-date, dental exams and limited follow-up appointments, mental health consultations (when deemed appropriate or necessary), and nutrition. The nutrition component is subdivided into assessment of children's dietary habits and dietician referral if necessary, provision of milk to children in the demonstration site classrooms, and limited dollars for actual developmental appropriate "hands-on" food activities in the classroom.

2. The parent involvement component is comprised of (a) monthly home visits which focus on meeting the needs of the families, (b) family support plans which are developed based on needs assessments, (c) monthly parent meetings, (d) involvement of parents on SDTP governing board, (e) locating resources to meet family needs, (f) resource information provided to parents at home visits, and (g) encouraging the cooperative relationship between parents/caregivers and schools.

3. The social service component, while smaller in scope than the other components, is of vital importance to families at or near the poverty level. The component consists of providing resources guides/materials, and assisting parents/caregivers in locating needed resources.

4. The education component consists of the transfer of information from Head Start to the public schools (with parents'/caregivers' permission), training teachers in the use of developmentally appropriate classroom practices (DAPs), and transition plan development which includes teachers, parents, and FSCs.

Theoretical Framework

The study described in this paper was designed to provide descriptive and interpretive data on the implementation of the NTP in South Dakota. Data will be used to "explain" or assist in understanding the quantitative results of the NTP Core Data Set. The NTP Core Data Set is comprised of standardized assessments which are administered yearly to the children and the children's parents, teachers, and principals at all thirty-one sites.

This paper uses both the "I" voice of the ethnographer as well as the "We" voice of the co-authors. The utilization of "active voice," "first person," and "present tense,"is consistent with ethnographic research (Adler, P. A. & Adler, P., 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Greene & McClintock, 1991; Hess, 1992; Janesick, 1994; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 1984; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Spradley, 1979, 1980; Worthen & Sanders, 1991).

The process of program implementation in South Dakota as well as the problems and solutions to those problems are issues we are concerned with. A phenomenological perspective will help us to understand the experiences of the actors (parents and children) involved in the SDTP. Understanding the experiences of parents will provide insight into what the SDTP means to parents/caregivers and how the SDTP has/has not benefitted children and families. Interpretivism maintains that human phenomena can best be understood as social constructions of meaning. "One individual's perceptions of meaning in a given setting is likely to differ from another's, and representing both is needed for an understanding of the

whole" (Greene & McClintock, 1991, p. 14). Understanding the meanings parents/caregivers from different SDTP sites attach to certain events will help us to understand the experiences of all the parents as a whole.

Ethnography has been chosen as the framework because of its holistic approach. The "whole view" will help understand the intended and unintended consequences of various interaction patterns occurring as a result of SDTP implementation. According to the research, ethnography can offer implicit or explicit explanations to account for interaction patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Greene and McClintock (1991) and Knapp (1995) suggest that comprehensive collaborative services for children and families should be studied within an ethnographic framework. Greene and McClintock (1991) proposed that the problems of previous Head Start research arose from the quantitative methodologies and the narrow focus on IQ and academic achievement. Multifaceted programs such as Head Start and the SDTP vary across settings and benefits differ among participants.

Ethnographers are being used more frequently in educational evaluation than they have been used in the past (Greene & McClintock, 1991; Hess, 1992; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 1984; Worthen & Sanders, 1991). According to LeCompte and Goetz, the reasons for the increase are due to the growth of educational ethnography and the limitations of quantitative research designs (1982). Hess states that the strength of ethnographic research lies in its descriptions of local situations

(1992). Descriptions of policy implementation explain how policies are implemented, why actors in the implementation process are acting as they are, and why policies are or are not successful (Hess, 1992; Peshkin, 1993).

Data Generation

Ethnographic data collection techniques, both interactive and noninteractive strategies, are used at the SDTP site. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe ethnographic data collection methods as being on a continuum of interactive to noninteractive. Pelto and Pelto define interactive strategies as methods which involve interactions between researcher and participant (1978). Noninteractive methods are less obtrusive and less reactive (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Interactive strategies used in the SDTP ethnographic study are participant observations, structured interviewing, and unstructured interviewing. Noninteractive methods used are content analyses of human artifacts.

The structured interviews utilize protocols developed at the SDTP site and are unique to the site. The protocols evoke open-ended responses and are given once yearly to demonstration and comparison participants. Utilizing comparison participants assists in searching for disconfirming evidence. Since only one ethnographer generates the data, the structured interviews help to compare responses across SDTP sites. Firestone and Herriott suggest that using a single investigator and standardized "instruments" increases reliability of the study (1984). The number of people interviewed each year has varied as the SDTP moves

through the school system. About 300 structured interviews have been recorded since SDTP implementation.

Unstructured interviews take place as need or opportunity presents itself. Unstructured interviews help clarify what I have observed or define the meaning of events that have taken place in the sites. The interviews are usually recorded as part of the field notes and expanded on after leaving the field.

I spend on the average of two days per week in the field for about two to four months each year "shadowing" FSCs as they go about their work. I shadow the FSCs to learn what they do, how they do it, why they do it, problems they encounter while implementing the SDTP, and solutions they develop for the problems. Participant observations are scheduled in advance and are rarely unannounced, as recommended by the literature (Agar, 1986; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Unscheduled observations are limited to impromptu visits at the schools during the time spent shadowing FSCs. Restricting observations to scheduled visits prevents my knowing a "typical day in the life of a FSC," but it would be impossible to observe the family service coordinators any other way. On an average day, a FSC may visit between eight to ten different homes, numerous community agencies, and one or two schools. It would be next to impossible locate FSCs over the vast sparsely populated area they cover. Several FSCs travel from fifty to one hundred miles round-trip every day.

Sketchy notes are taken during convenient times in the field. Notes are

never taken during home visits, because I feel it would be distracting and take away from the conversational quality of the visit. Note taking is also not done during school visits for a number of reasons: (a) I am very often an active participant in the classroom food activities that are presented by FSCs, (b) note taking and preparing food at the same time are impossible, and (c) note taking is distracting to students. My goal is to be as unobtrusive in the classrooms as possible.

One of the times note taking is possible in the field is when I ride with FSCs. As stated earlier, there is a considerable amount of travel time between home and school visits due to the sparse population of South Dakota. The time spent in FSCs' cars traveling between homes, agencies, and institutions allows time to build rapport with FSCs and provides opportunities for spontaneous interviews. The presence of FSCs allows me to check the accuracy of my observations and meaning assigned to the observations. The field notes are expanded to include descriptions, observations, and personal reflections when I return home.

The collection of artifacts includes journals written by FSCs at my request, written communication between schools and parents/caregivers, printed materials distributed by community agencies, and printed materials distributed by FSCs to families and schools. Journals help provide insight into program implementation and help to understand the perspectives of FSCs.

I use the HyperResearch computer program as a tool to help make sense of the data (Researchware, Inc., 1994). It facilitates data reduction through coding procedures and theory development through the use of bolean statements. Data

analysis began with the onset of data collection and is ongoing. Common themes emerge when datum incidents are assigned a descriptive or directional code, as suggested by the literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Datum incidents may be as small as one sentence or as large as several paragraphs.

Data are triangulated through multiple data generation methods and multiple data sources. According to the literature, triangulation is useful to discover and corroborate the meaning assigned to lived experiences by the actors (Adler, P. A. & Adler, P., 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Janesick, 1994; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith & Robbins, 1984).

Restricted Access

The spread-out nature of the South Dakota site, inclement weather, and graduate student status of the ethnographer have restricted time in the field. I was a graduate student and only able to work part-time on data generation from June, 1993, until the fall of 1996. At that time, I was hired full-time. Multiple data generation methods and length of the study help to compensate for reduced time in the field. I have not been able to move past the "outsider" status in all the communities, especially in the Native American community. Research debates whether one is ever able to gain "insider" knowledge of these communities (Stanfield, 1994).

Perspectives of Co-Authors and Bias Checks

The paper herein represents the combined efforts of the co-authors. The

multi-disciplinary backgrounds of the co-authors enrich the ethnographer's interpretations and serve to check biases of the ethnographer. The disciplinary backgrounds of the co-authors in early-childhood education, elementary education, special education, teacher education, program implementation, and educational evaluation combine with my background in sociology and research to enhance "Verstehen" or understanding (Weber, 1904/1949). As ethnographer, I have been primarily responsible for the design and implementation of the ethnographic study.

I utilize an additional bias check during data generation that is suggested by the literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Spradley, 1979; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The bias check involves recording my feelings and assumptions as "observer comments" in a journal. The journal serves to document my thought processes during data generation and helps me to "know" and to "understand" my perspectives, logic, and assumptions.

Results

Data generation is ongoing, and only a very small portion of the data can be presented in the paper herein. At the present, we are able to identify a number of common themes that emerge during data generation and analysis. One over-all theme present in the demonstration parent/caregiver data is that of their positive opinions of the SDTP. Families have been and are assisted by the SDTP in one way or another. Families differ both in their needs and their uses of FSCs and the SDTP. Other themes that emerge in the parent/caregiver data are (a) increased levels of involvement in the schools, (b) improvement in the relationships with personnel

(teachers and principals), (c) increased comfort levels in the schools, (d) increased involvement in their children's educational experiences, (e) increased information received from schools, (f) increased familiarity with the schools, (g) improved school attendance by the children, (h) healthier children, (i) eased transitions for children, and (j) increased access to needed social services. We combine the themes and form the four general categories that we had identified earlier as comprising the SDTP comprehensive services components: (a) education, (b) parent involvement, (c) health, and (d) social services. Pseudonyms are used to replace the participants' names.

Education

Children's transitions to the next higher grade are eased through the preparation of transition plans and through the presence of FSCs in classrooms. Transition plans for all the children are prepared each spring through the team efforts of parents/caregivers, teachers, and FSCs. The transition plans are used by teachers in the next higher grade to provide continuity of instruction for the children.

Family service coordinators have followed their cohorts from kindergarten through the third grade. The continuity of a "familiar face" helps children to adjust to new grades, classrooms, and teachers. There has been little turn-over since the SDTP was first implemented, which means that FSCs have remained a constant in most children's lives. Dorothy, a parent, succinctly stated how her son's experience in school has differed from that of her other children and why a "constant" is

important. Dorothy stated, "John has thoroughly enjoyed every year where my other children's success depended on whether they got along with the teacher or not. I think a lot had to with the continuity of the FSC always being there for him."

Angela, another parent, responding to a question that asked what she would change about the SDTP, repeated what we had stated earlier about the importance of a familiar face:

> I would like to see it [SDTP] extended through graduation from high school, even though the only change that I have seen so far is social...I would like to have a constant in their life. The FSC would follow the children all the way through, provide a resource, and a confidante for the kids and the parents. The kids get new teachers every year and a constant would help.

Other parents feel that FSCs help the children to feel special. When the children were in kindergarten, they often joined their mothers and FSCs during the FSCs' home visits. The children looked forward to the home visits and often stayed home just to be there when the FSCs were there. At home visits, FSCs bring material with activities that children can either do on their own or with their parents. Children know that the reason FSCs visit their parents/caregivers is because of them. The children view the FSCs as their "friends." Family service coordinators reinforce positive interactions between parents and children and provide parents with positive feed-back about the children's experiences in school.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is encouraged by FSCs both to the parents/caregivers and

to the schools. Parents/caregivers are encouraged to become actively involved in their children's educational experiences at home and at school. Family service coordinators work with schools and teachers within the schools in an effort to organize volunteers for classroom and school activities.

Home visits. One way FSCs encourage parent involvement in the schools is through routine home visits. Parents/caregivers receive information on school and community events from the FSCs at the home visits. Sonja, one of the FSCs, uses the monthly school bulletin sent home to parents as a starting point for what she includes in her parent resource packet. Sonja expands on one or more of the articles in the bulletin, finds additional resources which relate to the article(s) and then distributes it/them to parents/caregivers. Sonja also reminds parents/caregivers of up-coming schools and community events and up-coming school holidays. Before parent-teacher conferences, Sonja supplied the parents/caregivers with pamphlets which described how parents should approach issues at parent-teacher conferences. Parents/caregivers find the resources very useful and often share them with other families. Evelyn stated, "The family service coordinator gets resources that we can't get and she knows the people well enough to know what they are interested in."

Involvement in the schools. Principals at demonstration schools have noticed a number of positive changes in children's attendance at school and in parents' involvement in children's educational experiences, since implementation of the SDTP and the efforts of the FSCs. Mrs. Jones a principal, stated in an interview:

> Project has helped me to be proactive in interactions with parents. I'm more

> apt to address issues with parents and deal with concerns....students have a more positive attitude about school. They like to have extra people in the classroom and like to have parents come to school. They also like to have someone come into their home to talk about their education....I believe all the children of families who are in the Project have better attendance in school, better parent attendance during family activities at school, and parents seem to come into the school more readily.

Since implementation of the SDTP, one school has begun sending volunteer forms to parents/caregivers at the beginning of the school year which allow parents/caregivers to sign-up for one or more activities, one school has begun using room mothers to plan classroom activities, and four other schools have begun using parent/caregiver volunteers in the classrooms. Parents/caregivers read to the children, listen to the children read, assist in libraries, assist with food activities, help with centers, help with computers, bring pets to classrooms, and are "star speakers." As star speakers parents/caregivers visit classrooms and talk to the students about who they are and what they do.

One parent, Mrs. Schoch, states that her child's educational experience is improved because of the SDTP. Mrs. Schoch said, "Having the Transition Project helps us to work more with Jackie [her daughter] and volunteer more in the classroom. I think this has helped her a lot. It has made her feel special."

Half of the schools encourage parents/caregivers to come into the schools at noon and eat lunch with their children. In two of the schools, SDTP parent

meetings are held at noon after the parents/caregivers eat lunch with their children. The combined parent meetings and lunch encourage parents/caregivers to attend the parent meetings. As one principal stated, "Having parents eat lunch with their children has been the most successful thing [to increase parent involvement in the school]. Parents come in by the basketfuls!" Better parent/caregiver attendance at parent meetings has prompted several FSCs to offer parenting classes at the parent meetings. Parenting classes were previously not well attended, because parents had many other obligations and schedule conflicts. The combination of parent meetings, parenting classes, and eating lunch with their children has helped parents/caregivers become more involved in the schools and become more familiar with the schools. Parents/caregivers often visit classrooms before or after their parent meetings and lunches with the children.

During observations in the school I observed the reactions of the children as their parents/caregivers filed into the school for lunch. An excerpt from my field notes reveals what I saw:

> The children began lining up for lunch. Each teacher tried to organize her charges into neat lines, but the children were more interested in whether they could see Mom or Dad. They were craning their little necks to and fro like little geese, trying to spy their special guests. It was easy to tell when the special person was spotted, smiles arose on their little faces from one ear to the next. Sometimes there were hugs, and sometimes there were only great

big smiles. Always, though, one could see how happy the children were that Mom and Dad, or Grandma and Grandpa were there.

Parent-teacher/principal interactions. Since parents/caregivers are in the demonstration schools more frequently, interactions between school personnel and parents have improved, parents' comfort levels in the schools have improved, and parents' familiarity with the schools has increased. Marcy, a parent in one of the demonstration sites, thinks that the SDTP has assisted and improved her interactions with her child's teacher. Marcy said, "I have another contact point at the school [FSC] and that makes entry into the school easier and talking to the teacher that much easier." A quote from Connie Bernhardt, a parent, helps to show how the SDTP has helped her involvement in the school and her self-image:

> It just seemed like you could not get your foot in the door before with the school. I have become good friends with the teachers. I think before the teachers felt like you were invading their territory and now they welcome it. I like it. Everyone likes to have Mrs. Bernhardt come to class. I was there the other day and twenty kids were trying to give the FSC a hug. It is like that when I go in too. It has taught me patience. The first couple of times I was ready to pull my hair out.

Interactions between school personnel in demonstration schools and parents/caregiver, are more frequent and more positive than interactions between comparison parents/caregivers and school personnel. A school principal at a comparison site offers an example of negative interactions with parents/caregivers.

He said, "I call them [parents/caregivers] when I need to for truancy or their children's behavior problems."

Parent empowerment. Other parents have become empowered with the schools through increased interactions with school personnel, familiarity with the schools, and encouragement by FSCs. Nancy, a married, low income, high needs parent provides us with information on how the SDTP has affected her interactions with her child's teacher. Nancy said, "Project has empowered me with teachers. The teachers don't push me around so much. I don't have to agree if I don't like it!"

Health

As stated earlier, free health services are provided to children who attend demonstration schools. Health services are comprised of screenings, physical examinations, immunizations, dental exams, mental health consultations, and nutrition. Parents, teachers, and principals in the demonstration sites have noted that the children who are in the SDTP are healthier and have better attendance at school. The parents also note that their children in the SDTP have a much higher awareness of nutrition, come home from school less hungry, and are more self-sufficient in the kitchen than their other children. Teachers have noted that children are more alert in the classroom and are more familiar with weights and measurements.

Examinations. Screenings and dental and physical examinations have discovered illnesses and problems in the earliest stages. Ordinarily most parents/caregivers

would have waited until the diseases were more advanced before seeking treatment. Charlotte, a parent, stated:

> Having Transition Project pay physicals gave us the impetus to have the whole family get physicals. It gave me an opportunity to talk to the doctor about a couple of things that I was concerned about that I would not have called him up for otherwise. At that point the doctor gave us some medication for my son's migraine and that was very helpful.

Other parents/caregivers echoed Charlotte's statement about the positive effect of the SDTP on the whole family. The other parents/caregivers also have begun to schedule medical and dental exams for their entire families whenever they receive reminders for their children in the SDTP.

Milk breaks. The milk breaks at school provide children the boost that they need in the morning, or a little extra nutrition in the afternoon. Schools normally do not offer milk to children outside of mealtime. Since the SDTP pays for the milk, teachers are given the opportunity to give milk to the children in their class either in the mornings or in the afternoons. For children who have long bus rides (thirty minutes to an hour), the milk helps a great deal. Teachers have noted that the children are more alert, thanks to their little milk break.

Food activities. Children have greater self-sufficiency in their kitchens at home because of doing food activities in their classrooms. Family service coordinators plan food activities with the teachers and schedule them at times convenient to each classroom situation. Scheduling of the food activities varies both within and

among schools. Family service coordinators purchase, prepare, and carry-out the food activities. Children love and greatly anticipate each food activity.

An example of a food activity is making pretzels. On a day I observed a classroom, pretzels were made as a center activity. Four other centers were set up which involved math, reading, and geography activities. Each group of students rotated through the centers, participated in the activities, and enjoyed the food activity the most. The children took turns measuring ingredients and putting them into the pretzel dough. They were asked questions about measuring by both the teacher and the FSC. Children took turns mixing the dough, and after it had risen each child formed a little bit of the dough into a "pretzel-like" shape. The school cook baked the pretzels and later the children enormously enjoyed eating the pretzels during their milk break.

Parents/caregivers have all been very positive about the food activities. Often children want to make the food activities at home and help their parents/caregivers shop for the necessary food items. Many of the children have been introduced to nutritious foods that they normally would not have eaten. One Mom said, "If FSC told her to try it, she would. If Mom did, she didn't try it."

Esther, another parent, stated that her child eats many less sweets than before. Esther said, "Project has been very good for Ben, before all he would eat is sweets....he found out by tasting the things in school that he likes it. He asks for more nutritious things now and has become less picky."

Social Services

Family service coordinators, in their role as liaisons, connect parents/caregivers to the social services that they need. At home visits, parents/caregivers are asked if they have any need for resources. Needs assessment forms are filled out during one of the first meetings with parents and updated at each subsequent visit. Parents/caregivers are comfortable with the FSCs and talk to them about their needs. Family service coordinators then look to local and regional agencies to assist the families. Families are often surprised at how efficient FSCs are at finding resources. Families who have never dealt with social service agencies do not know how to proceed with getting their needs met. Families who have had to deal with social service agencies find the FSCs more helpful, more approachable, and more effective. Unfortunately, the availability of resources seems to be decreasing. The journal of a FSC provides us with insight into her challenges, concerns, and an example of how she assists families; as before a pseudonym will be used in place of the parent's name:

> Liz's family is going through a lot of difficulties. She is trying to finish college and is having money, kid, and relationship problems. So many benefits have been cut, fuel assistance and weatherization, that it is difficult for her to get by. I was able to provide clothes, Christmas gifts, and a listening ear, but I was unable to do much more do to cutbacks in social programs. It is so hard for a single Mom to try to provide for the needs of her children.

At-risk Students

The original design of the SDTP provided for service delivery to all children in the designated demonstration classrooms. As stated earlier, limited services have been extended during the 1996-1997 school year to include at-risk students in the demonstration schools. The services received are primarily in the social services component. This is attempt to demonstrate to school systems how they can extend some of the services offered by the SDTP to the students who need the services the most. Principals, teachers, and counselors have begun referring at-risk children to FSCs. Parents/caregivers who were previously in the SDTP have also sought the services of FSCs on their own. The following FSC journal entry provides additional information on how FSCs assist the needs of at-risk children through helping their parents/caregivers to help themselves:

> I received a call from a previous family. She'd lost her job and needed items for her kids on the first day of school. I took over school supplies plus clothes and food. I have also been helping Mom look for a different job and wrote a letter of reference.

Summary

In summary, families of children who attend demonstration schools receive comprehensive school-based services. In addition, at-risk children have been added to the Cohort II children for the final year of SDTP services. As a result of participation in the SDTP, many of the families' needs have been met. The families' needs would not have been met otherwise, due to the lack of school and family

resources. Families have been empowered, children have received an educational boost, and schools are beginning to understand the "whole" child instead of just the cognitive frame.

Discussion

While phenomenology may be on the fringe of sociological theories (Bottomore & Nisbet, 1978), it is used consistently in anthropology (Greene & McClintock, 1991; Smith, 1992). Phenomenology, according to Schutz (1932/1967), defines meanings as aspects of the social world which are important to the actors. The objective meaning contexts represent the sets of meanings that exist in a culture as a whole and have an objective existence which can be studied by sociologists (Schutz, 1932/1967). In the study herein, the meanings attached to the SDTP by the participants have been the focus. The objective meaning contexts of the SDTP were identified earlier and include the four comprehensive services component areas of health, education, social services, and parent involvement.

The school-based comprehensive services of the SDTP are an example of an attempt to ameliorate the difficult and stressful environments some children are raised in. Young children are often unable to focus on the academic and social demands of school because of problems in their homes; problems may include child abuse and neglect, homelessness, poor health, and family poverty (Berrick & Duerr, 1996). Research supports provision of comprehensive school-based services to young children (Berrick & Duerr, 1996; Chafel, 1990; Gleason, 1993; Huffman, Benson, Gebelt, & Phelps, 1996; Raikes, 1995; Rogers Tracy, 1995; Stallings, 1995

Taylor, 1996). Integrated comprehensive services, according to Chafel (1990) and Taylor (1996), must be provided early to be the most effective for children's educational success.

Consistent with the research, parents found FSCs to be particularly helpful in their roles as community-school-home liaisons (Chrispeels, 1996; Montgomery Halford, 1996; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992). As liaisons, FSCs have increased parents'/caregivers' familiarity with their school systems, helped parents/caregivers gain access to informal information about schools and communicates, helped parents/caregivers become more involved in the schools systems, and assisted parent/caregiver interactions with school personnel. The effective schools literature points to parent involvement as important for the educational success of children (Epstein, 1995; Funk & Brown, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Huffman et al., 1996; Keith, T. Z., Keith, P. B., Quirk, Cohen-Rosenthal, & Franzese, 1996; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1996; Moore & Brown, 1996; Rogers Tracy, 1995; Rosenthal & Young Sawyers, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Zeldin, 1990).

The parent/caregivers in the study herein perceive the comprehensive services context of the SDTP as effective and would like their children to continue receiving services through their graduation from high school. The comprehensive services mean that the children receive better medical and dental care, have parents/caregivers who are more involved in their education, receive improved nutrition, have better school attendance, have stressful conditions at home eased,

and have an advocate in the schools. Implications of the SDTP comprehensive services are that the cultural or social capital of children's families is increased and ultimately the life-chances for the children are improved.

Significance of Study

As stated earlier, the comprehensive, early-education intervention efforts of the SDTP are an attempt to improve the life-chances for children by improving their home and school environments. Understanding the perceptions of parents/caregivers will help researchers, practitioners, and policy makers interpret SDTP implementation results, problems, and provide suggestions for future programs. Learning what the context of SDTP has meant to parents/caregivers is fundamentally important to all SDTP participants.

While schools may be concerned about the costs of comprehensive services, the nation's failure to compete globally is essentially more costly. Addressing the needs of at-risk students is vitally important to the educational success of children and to our national economy.

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